

Response

A. Introduction

Claims 1-24 remain pending in the application. The Examiner has initially rejected claims 1, 3-4, 6-10, 12-14, and 21 based solely on U.S. Patent No. 4,864,961 to Slonski. He additionally has rejected claims 22-24 under 35 U.S.C. § 112 as indefinite, objected to “informal” aspects of various claims, and suggested minor changes to the title, specification, and Abstract of the application. According to the Examiner, claims 2, 5, 11, and 15-20 would be allowable if appropriately rewritten.

B. Objections

Applicant has amended the title, specification, and Abstract of the application as the Examiner recommends. Applicant also has deleted all references to “abovementioned” from the claims and modified claim 1 to avoid using parentheses. Applicant believes these revisions resolve all objections of the Examiner and requests, therefore, that such objections be withdrawn.

C. The Slonski Patent

Described in the Slonski patent is an auxiliary flotation apparatus for a vessel. Included as part of the apparatus are inflatable tubular sheaths 30 with flexible walls and valve mechanism 130. As illustrated in Fig. 3 of the Slonski patent, valve mechanism 130 connects to fitting 134, which in turn connects to boss 80 of cap member 70. Corresponding lips 68 and 72 of rigid cap member 70 and central member 32 clamp rim 106 of the inflatable sheath 30. See Slonski, col. 4, l. 59 through col. 5, l. 44; Figs. 3 and 6.

According to the Examiner, valve mechanism 130 of the Slonski patent constitutes an accessory “indirectly secured to” a flexible wall of inflatable sheath 30 (apparently via fitting 134 and portions of cap member 70). See Office Action at p. 4. However, even assuming (but not conceding) the Examiner’s assertion is correct, it wholly neglects to consider the final clause of Applicant’s original claim 1, which requires that the accessory be “*mounted on* the flexible wall.” *In no way is valve mechanism 130 mounted on a wall of inflatable sheath 30, nor is such mounting feasible.* Instead, to the extent valve mechanism is “mounted on” anything, it must be mounted on either fitting 134 or cap member 70.

Although Applicant believes no amendment to claim 1 is necessary to distinguish the Slonski patent, he nevertheless has revised the claim to reiterate that the accessory is “*mounted on* [the] flexible wall of the enclosure and *supported thereby*.” Clear is that valve mechanism 130 of the Slonski patent is *neither* mounted on a flexible wall of sheath 30 (as noted above) *nor* supported thereby. For at least either of these two reasons, Applicant requests that claims 1-21 be allowed.

D. Claims 22-24

The Examiner initially rejected claims 22-24 as indefinite, expressing uncertainty as to which features were incorporated into the claims by reference to claim 1. In response, Applicant has rewritten at least the preambles of each of claims 22-24. Applicant believes these changes should resolve the Examiner’s prior uncertainties and, accordingly, requests that claims 22-24 be allowed as well.

Petition for Extension of Time

Pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 1.136(a), Applicant petitions the Commissioner for all extensions of time needed to respond to the Office Action.

Fees

Attached is authorization to charge a credit card for \$450.00 for the petition fee. Applicant believes no other fee presently is due. However, if Applicant's belief is mistaken, the Commissioner is authorized to debit Deposit Account No. 11-0855 for any additional fee due as a consequence of Applicant's submission of this paper.

Conclusion

Applicant requests that the Examiner allow claims 1-24 and that a patent containing these claims issue in due course.

Respectfully submitted,



Dean W. Russell
Reg. No. 33,452
Attorney for the Assignee

OF COUNSEL:

Kilpatrick Stockton LLP
1100 Peachtree Street
Suite 2800
Atlanta, Georgia 30309
(404) 815-6528